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SUBJECT: GOS INTENDS TO MOVE CAUTIOUSLY IN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE  
UNITED STATES

¶1. (SBU) The Government of Sudan intends to move cautiously in its engagement with the U.S. and the international community, Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahudin told CDA Fernandez during their final meeting May 14. While the ruling National Congress Party is eager to move forward with the Darfur peace process and CPA implementation, it does not think it wise to jump at the latest initiative or proposal until having planned ahead carefully and considered the lessons of the past, according to Dr. Ghazi. Responding to U.S. and UN requests that the NCP submit a timeline for prisoner exchanges with the JEM rebel group (per the February Doha Goodwill Agreement), and consider the U.S. proposal for a "witnesses conference" on CPA implementation, Ghazi urged that the U.S. and the NCP should discuss more deeply a longer-term strategy for Darfur that will address the root causes of the conflict, including the cross border conflict with Chad. With regard to the CPA, Ghazi said that the government does not like the idea of a "CPA in crisis" conference, "because that is not the reality."

¶2. (SBU) "Khalil Ibrahim is nothing in Darfur," pointed out Dr. Ghazi, noting that the Zaghawa ethnic group that he purports to represent is a tiny minority and that Ibrahim is very unpopular, even less popular than fellow Zaghawa Minni Minawi. "The Fur and the Arabs in Darfur will never accept an agreement signed with Khalil," stated Ghazi, pointing out that the Darfur peace process must be broader than just talks with JEM. Ghazi did not discount the value of a ceasefire with JEM, but asked rhetorically what would be gained by releasing JEM prisoners - in the absence of a ceasefire - other than providing Khalil with additional foot soldiers and perhaps some limited short-term PR gain for the government. JEM must be viewed in the context of the regime in Chad, noted Ghazi, alluding to the close family ties that Chadian President Deby has with Khalil Ibrahim, and which compelled Deby to begin supporting Ibrahim due to tribal pressures from within his own Zaghawa clan. With regard to the broader issues of peace and security and a political settlement in Darfur, Ghazi suggested instead that the GOS would like to present some of its own proposals on Darfur to the Special Envoy during his next visit, without the pressure of an urgent timeline on prisoner releases. "Please don't allow the Special Envoy to become imprisoned by this prisoner release issue," pleaded Ghazi.

¶3. (SBU) With regard to CPA implementation, Ghazi suggested that the GOS and the U.S. should discuss "common interests" in advance of the Envoy's next visit to lay the groundwork. "Much of the agreement has been implemented, and we also want to get to the elections and the referendum, as well as reconstruct the relationship with the SPLM," stated Ghazi. Pressed on the proposal for an international conference on the CPA, Ghazi agreed that there is "nothing wrong" with attempts to marshal international support for the CPA, "but we must be cautious and move forward carefully, planning ahead appropriately." Ghazi explained that this is not only because of

the importance of these decisions for the future of Sudan, but also because of Sudan's relationship with the U.S. and the international community. "We are interested in a normal relationship with the U.S., but it should be based on principles. We feel that we have not been treated fairly for a long time," said Ghazi, referencing U.S. promises in the past to remove Sudan from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List. "Politics in the U.S. may be fleeting, and we won't immediately leave the trenches to deal with someone who is unpredictable." However, Ghazi noted that the GOS appreciates the positive approach taken by Special Envoy Gration and promised that the government intends to be constructive in its engagement with him. Ghazi urged that the Special Envoy meet President Bashir during the Envoy's next visit, as he is the "key decision-maker on all of these issues" and can help "unblock many things if he sees that it is in Sudan's interest to do so." Ghazi also urged that the U.S. and Sudan begin preparing now for the Envoy's next visit, preparing in advance the discussion points and agenda to make such a meeting possible. Ghazi concluded saying that he believes SE Gration will be successful in achieving a breakthrough with Sudan.

14. (SBU) Comment: Ghazi had clearly prepared carefully for this meeting, passing a carefully-crafted message that the government is willing to be constructive on Darfur and the CPA, but wants to discuss these issues with the U.S. in advance and share ideas on what will be successful before it agrees to initiatives such as the CPA witnesses conference. The government is also clearly tying these issues to the U.S.-Sudan bilateral relationship, and wants assurances on what steps the U.S. is willing to take to improve relations before it is willing to show its hand. Laying down clear markers on what we need to see in order to be able to take action on items of interest to the Sudanese will be essential to see progress

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on the items of greatest interest to us, namely peace in Darfur and continued peaceful implementation of the CPA. Other seasoned NCP interlocutors such as Yehia Babiker Hussein have pointed out that the U.S. should not assume that the NCP won't do these things anyway ("we should not have to point out that it's in our interests as well to have peace in Darfur"), but the NCP clearly realizes that assistance from and involvement by the U.S. will be critical to getting buy-in from Darfurians, the SPLM, and key international players. The NCP knows exactly what it is and is not willing to give up in order to stay in power, has decades of experience in these types of negotiations, and must be approached carefully and methodically. However, carefully-planned engagement clearly seems the best approach to achieve our objectives, if we are able to define what we can offer and when. Absent that, the NCP will likely turn its attention elsewhere.

ASQUINO